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***The Concept of Jewishness in Howard Jacobson's The Finkler
Question***

Bakalářská práce

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Podpis

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Introduction

This thesis focuses on a novel by Anglo-Jewish author Howard Jacobson, *The Finkler Question*, that was published in 2010 by Bloomsbury Press and has immediately drawn the attention of both readers and critics. The book won the 2010 Man Booker Prize as one of only a few comic books that received this prestigious award. In the story, Jacobson comments with bitter humour on topics such as friendship, rivalry, loss and mourning and also belonging and identity. The aim of this thesis is to explain the author's view on Jewishness in the 21st century, which is one of the leitmotivs of the novel.

The thesis contains two parts, theoretical and practical. The theoretical part provides a useful background to the main topic discussed in the practical part. It is divided into three chapters each of which focuses on a specific issue. The aim of the first chapter is to bring a short account of the history of the Anglo-Jewish community as it is the longest existing ethnic minority in Britain and its position within the British majority has changed many times. The community survived the crisis it suffered when it was banished by law in the middle ages and managed to thrive and prosper for centuries. It also survived the crisis connected to the Nazi anti-Semitic politics that spread through Europe in the twentieth century and recently, the community and its literature has experienced a new revival. The second chapter focuses on the stereotypes and literary types that developed in British literature during the centuries of co-habitation of English population with Jewish minority and finally, the third chapter describes the position of contemporary Anglo-Jewish literature and its revival. It shows that Howard Jacobson's novel is not without its background, but belongs to a recent stream of literature focusing on Jewish-related issues and mainly on the identity of a Jewish person living in modern Britain.

The practical part creates the core of this thesis as it analyses the text of the novel itself. As it is an interpretation of the text, it is more subjective and provides my personal view on the text. It is divided into six chapters that try to provide a synoptic description of Jacobson's concept of Jewishness from several points of view. It explains what attitude the different characters have towards Jewishness, how they identify themselves and how they manage to deal with prejudices against Jews. There is also a description of the author's conception of Judaism, its rituals and traditions and the role that, according to Jacobson, religion plays in the lives of contemporary non-orthodox British Jews.

Theoretical Part

The aim of the Practical part of this thesis is to present a brief introduction to the history of the Jewish community in Britain and explain its position in Contemporary British society, to mention the two main types of Jewish Characters in English fiction that are both based on myths and prejudices, to compare the position of Jewish literature in Britain to that in the United States and finally to introduce Howard Jacobson as Anglo-Jewish author.

I.I Jewish community in Britain

There are more than a quarter of a million Jews in Britain today, which accounts for about 0.5 % of the national UK population¹. The community itself has undergone many internal changes and, similarly, their relationships with the English majority have been transforming dramatically throughout centuries. To understand issues that the Jewish community has to cope with in the 21st century and which are mirrored in the works of contemporary Jewish authors, it is important to at least briefly mention the history of Jewish settlement and the development that the community has experienced since its establishment.

1.1.1 Anglo-Jewish population throughout the history

For most of the middle ages and the Renaissance, from 1290 through 1650, Jews were banned from England by law.² This fact contributed to the formation of many myths and prejudices in British society. As there were no Jews present, ignorance and fear of a different culture and religion resulted in a generally negative attitude towards them. Cromwell's puritan government, however, was more favourable to the idea of repelling the expulsion order therefore it was possible for both professing and messianic Jews to settle in Britain again in the 17th century³. It was the time when Judaism was banned in several European countries including Spain and that was why most of the immigrants were of Spanish origin. In England they could abandon Christianity and return to their original faith, even though it was difficult when they had been cut off from the Hebrew language and tradition for centuries. The community grew only gradually yet gained

¹ <http://www.bjpa.org/Publications/downloadPublication.cfm?PublicationID=13248> 5

² Endleman 15

³ Endleman 26

influence and slowly improved their social status. While at the beginning of the nineteenth century the Jewish community was associated with violence and crime due to their social circumstances and poor education, by the year 1870 the situation had changed considerably – majority of people of Jewish decent were English citizens with full rights and belonged to the middleclass. This was achieved thanks to the generosity of wealthier Jewish businessmen who feared that the British society will have a generalised view on Jews and that it will wrong their business plans and therefore established institutions to help the poor immigrants⁴. As the situation within the community stabilised, it was less difficult for the English majority to embrace the religious differences and accept Jews as an inherent part of British society.

Before the outbreak of World War I, another wave of poor Jewish immigrants flooded Britain, bringing a new division into the once stabilised economic situation of the native community, making the English majority recognise the existence of a “Jewish Question” for the first time⁵. The British did not distinguish between the poor newcomers and the generation of well-adapted middle-class businessmen and therefore the minority had to provide help for its poor members to prevent possible generalised negative sentiment. Although the economic differences among English Jewry equalised soon, the community lost the trust of the British majority.

The interwar period was marked by rising anti-Semitism which was not systematic, though perceptible⁶. The British Jewry got to a very difficult situation, they had to witness an enormous increase of anti-Jewish violence in Europe and, simultaneously, cope with their own unstable position in Britain. Things worsen even more with the outbreak of the war, even though many young Jewish men joined the army and fought against Nazism. Jewish refugees were interrogated by local tribunals and, if classified as possibly disloyal, held in detaining camps⁷. Some of the representatives of the Anglo-Jewish community were trying to help European Jews, but mostly they were careful and tried not to stir any more animosity by openly appealing to British government to open the borders to Jewish refugees.

After the war, the community underwent many changes. It came through a wide secularisation and a serious numerical decline as many of culturally integrated Jews

⁴ Endelman 71

⁵ Endelman 150

⁶ <http://jcpa.org/dje/articles3/british.htm>

⁷ Endelman 226

assimilated completely⁸. Larger Jewish communities in Leeds, Manchester and Glasgow diminished considerably and some of the smaller communities died out. Today 72% of the British Jewry is settled in London. The Jewish community also ceased being closed and while embracing the English ways of life a lot of Jewish people lost interest in religion and turned their attention towards the newly formed state of Israel that was largely supported by British Jewry. Marcus Roberts wrote in his *Story of England's Jews* (2007) that: “community efforts to support Israel were to some extent a substitute for a religious or traditional Jewish identity, the Six Day War of 1967 was perhaps the high point of this feeling when Anglo-Jewry rallied to the cause.”⁹ Zionism that used to be looked at as a dangerous extremist direction became popular because it served as some kind of connection among secularised Jewish minority. This bound proved necessary as many Brits of Jewish decent assimilated and lost connection with the community. The ultra-Orthodox branch kept its strong position and even grew in numbers,¹⁰ it started to play an important role in the communal life and brought new variants of Judaism, especially Reformed and Liberal congregations.

1.1.2 Contemporary position of Jewish community in Britain

Britain, the late colonial empire, entered the new millennium in a state of a “crisis of multiculturalism¹¹”, when after several urban riots in 2001 and, most notably, after the London bombing in 2005 British minorities started to be perceived as a source of trouble and possible threat to the national security. However, the Jewish minority was repeatedly mentioned as the “model” or “ideal minority¹²” in a subsequent public discussion. Model minority meant the one that achieved to integrate and fully accept the British way of life.

The Anglo-Jewish community meanwhile coped with a crisis of their own, during the last decades of the twentieth century it was still decreasing in numbers and became even more secularised¹³. It was clear that there was a danger of gradual assimilation

⁸ Roberts 54

⁹ Roberts 54

¹⁰ Endelman 229

¹⁰ http://www.nasameer.com/uploads/7/7/4/6/7746984/nasar_meer_and_tariq_modood_-_political_studies.pdf 2

¹² <http://www.dissentmagazine.org/blog/on-brick-lane-are-jews-the-model-immigrants>

¹³ <http://www.bjpa.org/Publications/downloadPublication.cfm?PublicationID=13248>

and that roused efforts to preserve and revive the community. Jewish writers reacted to the discussion about the model community with bringing up the topic of Jewish identity versus Englishness. Many writers seemed to agree with Jonathan Wilson, a Jewish American novelist born in Britain, “a Jew can never really be English” without “the abnegation of a certain aspect of your personality.¹⁴” Among the writers who thus contributed to the discussion belonged, besides Howard Jacobson, for example Naomi Alderman or Richard Aronowitz.

It was not only literature that thrived, religious communities revitalised and cultural centres as well as religious schools often became heart of Jewish community life in the beginning of the new millennium¹⁵. *Jewish Renaissance*, a new magazine focusing on Anglo-Jewish culture as well as on the news from Israel and Jewish minorities worldwide, started to be issued in autumn 2001. To illustrate the current revival, the Anglo-Jewish community celebrated 350th anniversary of the resettlement in Britain in 2006 with a festival bringing the Jewish culture to the streets of London.

¹⁴ http://www.jbooks.com/interviews/index/IP_Weber_English.htm

¹⁵ <http://www.bjpa.org/Publications/downloadPublication.cfm?PublicationID=13248>

I.II Jews in the eyes of the British authors and population

Long before such a thing as Anglo-Jewish literature developed, Jews were portrayed in books written by members of the English Majority. Hebraic characters were usually flat or even stock and only rarely described in a positive way. In fact two main types of a literary Jew developed in British literature that reflects the common way of describing Jewry throughout Europe. The first one was the bloodthirsty villain, or the “Shylock” type, that reflected the popular prejudices and was composed of all the possible negative features to induce a predictable reader response. The second type was the good godly Jew, or the mythical “Mordecai”¹⁶ type, that was trying to bring them in a positive light though still tend to emphasize their otherness and exclusion. The literary representation of Jews affected the public view on them and, in a way, also caused the Anglo-Jewish authors to feel a need to defend Jewishness in their books. The first portraits of Jews free from prejudice appeared in the twentieth century when finally a Jewish character did not necessarily have to function as some kind of an anti-social element, but could take on the role of an “Everyman”¹⁷.

1.2.1 Shylock type

“We Jews can fawn like spaniels when we please; and when we grin we bite; yet are our looks as innocent and harmless as a lamb's.”¹⁸

Shylock was an ambivalent Hebraic character who was described as a villain but in the same tame as a suffering person introduced by Shakespeare in his *Merchant of Venice*. He gave name to a whole type of Jewish characters that prevailed in English literature till the twentieth century. Nevertheless, Shakespeare was not the first one to portray a vicious Jew, this tendency appeared already in medieval folk tales and Miracles of the Blessed Virgin. There they were described as almost daemonic characters indulged in ritual murders, devouring Christian children and practicing unjust usury¹⁹. The reason why they were so mercilessly described as embodiment of pure evil was because they were publicly labelled as Christ-murderers and enemies of Christianity. The society stigmatized the unknown religion and accused Jews of using blood of innocent

¹⁶ Lehrmann 117

¹⁷ Cohen 5

¹⁸ Marlowe

¹⁹ Cohen 11

Christian children for their secret rituals. The only Jewish characters described in a positive light in that time were converts to Christianity. One of the most important antagonist of Jewish characters of the pre-Shakespearian era was Marlowe's Barabas, the main character of *The Jew of Malta*. He was described in accordance with many of that time stereotypes – the only thing he really cared for was his fortune, and when he was deprived of it he turned into a Machiavellian villain driven by revenge that plotted against everyone and caused death of many people including his only daughter. He also was an outcast thanks to his religion.

In this tradition Shakespeare introduced Shylock as a character that was simultaneously the villain and the victim of the play, he embodied both a monster and a human. Similarly to Barabas, Shylock was a proud man wronged by the world and therefore taking revenge. He was repeatedly referred to as “the Jew”, the author took advantage of deep rooted prejudice to bring out the connotation of animosity. Also, when he decided to kill a man, he wanted to meet his helper in the synagogue reminding the audience of the medieval image of a Jew as a bloodthirsty murderer practicing secret worship rituals. As Shylock gained more and more power his picture changed into an embodiment of pure evil. At the same time, however, he was described as a true human - he suffered from persecution and felt deep pain. There the modern audience can sympathize with him even though originally this ambivalence was perceived mainly as a comic element.

Variations on Shylock then repeatedly occurred in various times not only in British literature. Dickens's Fagin or Trollope's Augustus Melmotte were great examples. This type of Jewish characters also reappeared with the rising of Anti-Semitism in America in the beginning of the twentieth century. One observer remarked in 1935 that “it is not unusual to find a reference to a Jewish character in English fiction which is not in the Shylock tradition” and that “it is the rarest thing to find a Hebraic character presented in the normal light.”²⁰ Such stereotyping can be seen, for example, in Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) in the character of Wolfsheim or in Graham Greene's *Stamboul Train* (1932). Jewish characters are there described as villains connected with crime and illegal activities. It was not until the end of the war that Jewish characters started to be portrayed positively, without negative bias against them.

²⁰ Endelman 200

1.2.2 Mordecai type

“A Jewish man in an ancient coat, long of skirt, and wide of pocket. A venerable man, bald and shining at the top of his head, and with long grey hair flowing down at its sides and mingling with his beard.”²¹

The right opposite of a villain Shylock was an eternal good Jew of Hebraic tradition. This type of character was strongly idealized and bore features of high morality, wisdom and erudition, half prophet, half prodigy. This characterization went much deeper in history than the negative view, it had its roots in oriental literature and was fully described in the Biblical story of *Esther*, where an exiled kind-hearted Jew wisely brought up his ward, a future Queen, according to the Hebraic traditions and used the same wisdom to advice the King of Persia, which not only saved the entire Jewish community, but it was also beneficial to the entire kingdom. Besides his wisdom, he was brave and stood up alone against a big conspiracy and above all he was modest and did not ask for any reward.

This idealized model was used by Charles Dickens to create a character that would contrast his Jewish antagonists. He established his Victorian Good Jew as a flat, two dimensional character that did not develop and was unconvincing, as could be seen for example in *Our Mutual Friend* (1865) on Mr. Riah, a man who was a public person for a money landing company, oriental by his manners and clothing (and therefore did not fit entirely into the contemporaneous London.) Though he remained an outsider, he stood up bravely against Anti-Semitism and served as a protector of a young beautiful Lizzie. There was a discussion²² whether Dickens created his Riah as an apology for Fagin, or whether he simply wanted to step out of the anti-Semitic tradition and create anti-Shylock character that would challenge the deep-rooted prejudices.

George Elliot might have had similar motives when she wrote her last novel, *Daniel Deronda* (1876), that was abundant in positive Hebraic characters. The most obviously idealized Jewish character was the protagonist himself, falling for Judaism long before he discovered the truth about his Jewish origin. He was not only a good looking man with leadership skills, he was truly noble and kind. When another almost mythical character, the prophet and visionary Mordecai, told him that he was to be the leader

²¹ Dickens 328

²² <http://www.borrowers.uga.edu/781449/display>

of the Jewish community, he accepted the call and started to study Hebraic wisdom and later pursued an almost Zionist dream of the land of the Jewish nation in Palestine. Mira, Mordecai's sister and Daniel's wife was also described in a very positive way as a modest virtuous singer with an angelic voice.

All those positive characters attempted to change the way the society saw Jews in their time, but had one similar feature as the negative ones – they were too farfetched to be seen as life like. Nevertheless, both Dickens and Eliot achieved a positive reception²³ not only by Jewish community, but by the wide readership in general

²³ Cohen 77

I.III Position of contemporary Anglo-Jewish Literature

Primarily, it is necessary to specify what is meant by the term “Contemporary literature” to be able to further discuss its specific parts. Nick Bentley decided to set the milestone of contemporary at 1975, the year when Margaret Thatcher was elected as a leader of Conservative Party, because it “marks a key moment of transition in Britain politics and extension of social, cultural and economic climate”²⁴ This specification will be also used in this thesis.

This era in British literature could also be characterised as Post-colonial, as many authors benefited from their ethnical background being descendants of immigrants from South- East Asia, Africa and Caribbean. Topics such as assimilation and identity thus entered the literary scene not exclusively as a domain of Jewish minority. They appear (besides the obvious theme of Britain’s past colonialism), for example, in Salman Rushdie’s *Shame* (1983) or Courtia Newland’s *Society Within* (1999). Hand in hand with this ethnic stream went the revival of Scottish, Irish and Welsh national literatures shown for example in Seamus Deane’s poetry or in Niall Griffiths’ and Irvin Welsh’s novels. It was only understandable that in such environment that supported development of minority literatures the Jewish literature flourished as well.

1.3.1 Renaissance of Anglo-Jewish Literature

*“The story of our finely tuned accommodations to English culture is a fascinating one, sometimes tragic, often heroic, always funny, and never less than urgent beneath a quiescent surface. It is time we told it.”*²⁵

What was commonly referred to as a Jewish Renaissance aroused from a crisis of the Anglo-Jewish literature²⁶ in the after-war era when authors with Jewish ancestry writing in Britain did not comment on Jewish-related topics. Probably the most prominent of these authors was the Nobel Prize winner Harold Pinter (1930-2008), who was made a Companion of honour for services to literature by the Queen in 2002.²⁷ However, it is not possible to say that he was a Jewish author as he deliberately did not deal with questions of Jewish identity and religion or topics related to the state of Israel.

²⁴ Bentley 2

²⁵ http://www.jbooks.com/interviews/index/IP_Weber_English.htm

²⁶ Cheyette 38

²⁷ <http://www.haroldpinter.org/home/index.shtml>

Even though several authors of Jewish origin described Jewish characters in their novels, those characters were almost assimilated as in Arnold Wesker's trilogy consisting of *Chicken Soup with Barley* (1958), *Roots* (1959) and *I am Talking about Jerusalem* (1960), where the middle-classed Kahn family have to deal much more with their belonging to the communist party than with their Jewishness.

Nevertheless, the situation changed by the beginning of the new millennium when the authors who before had dealt with different topics and presented only assimilated Jewish characters started to address Jewish issues openly. As Donald Weber stated, “*perhaps in response to—or, more likely, as part of—the noisy Babel of voices currently invigorating literary Britain, a rising generation of Anglo-Jewish writers now seeks to be heard.*”²⁸ It was not only literature of the Jewish minority in Britain that thrived, the entire community was on its rise, Jewish topics were penetrating all forms of art and the public was involved in cultural life of the community. This year, the eighteenth *UK Jewish Film Festival* will take place in London, showing films that are dealing with holocaust, genocide, racism and interfaith²⁹ (interactions between persons of different religious faiths)³⁰. Also several magazines concerning with Jewish issues started to be published in Britain, for example *Jewish News*, *The Jewish Quarterly* that maps the Anglo-Jewish intellectual life or *JLifestyle, the Jewish Magazine* that focus more on the business opportunities in the community as well as many internet journals such as *Jewish Renaissance* focusing on cultural life, or *Totallyjewish.com* that is trying to address younger readers.

The major literary works that marked this transformation of Anglo-Jewish literature from something marginal into a legitimate stream within the British literature as a whole were, among others, Mike Leigh's play *Two Thousand Years* (2005), bringing up the question of “what does being a Jew mean to individual characters” and Howard Jacobson's humorous *Kalooki Nights* (2006), which were long listed for the Man Booker's Prize. The novel is as bitter as it is funny, which is a feature that appears also in his *Finkler Question*. The author touches on questions of identity and Jewishness in both books alongside with topics of death, friendship and relationships in general. One of the most prominent contemporary Anglo-Jewish poets is Richard Aronowitz whose poems were published, for example, in the Anthology *Anvil New Poets*.

²⁸ http://www.jbooks.com/interviews/index/IP_Weber_English.htm

²⁹ <http://ukjewishfilm.org/festivals/>

³⁰ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/interfaith>

Another important work discussing Jewish identity openly is Naomi Alderman's *Disobedience* (2006), which won the Orange Award for New Writers. The world of the London Ultra-Orthodox Jewish community is presented there. The protagonist, Ronit, a daughter of a beloved London Rabbi, moves to New York to find love while her former lover Esti has to stay with her husband in the community which considers her different. Many traditional rituals connected, for example, with celebrating Sabbath are explained there, the ancient Jewish texts are quoted, but the story focuses on the life in the modern world where those traditions are no longer the key part of life of Jewish people.

1.3.2. Anglo-Jewish literature compared to American Jewish literature

Even though the American Jewish community can be tracked back only to the seventeenth century, which is several centuries after the establishment of the Jewish community in Britain³¹, the community in the United States did not have to face violence of Holocaust or oppression of dictators and soon out-numbered the British one several times. In fact, not only one Jewish community was created in America, Jews gathered in various places also according to their motherland and religious group they belonged to. Each of these groups was unique and produced a different kind of literature. Therefore, American Jewish literary history is much more diverse than the British one. Many texts were written in Yiddish or Hebrew especially in more Orthodox communities.

Because of a direct threat that Nazism represented for British Jewry, there were not many works of Anglo-Jewish authors discussing Holocaust openly, nevertheless, in America authors did capture their feelings and views on this topic. One of the authors who commented on it was a playwright Arthur Miller, for example, in his play *Broken Glass* (1994), where he presented a woman, who was so affected by the Nazi threat and mainly by the Kristallnacht that she became paralysed from the waist down, pointing out to a certain lack of reaction of American Jewry to German Nazi politics during the war.

Also the American Jewish literature went through its own renaissance and had to cope with the problem of assimilation. Several authors started to publish books idealizing the State of Israel and Jewish Characters trying to keep the community close. Among those authors belonged for example Leon Uris with his *Exodus* (1958).

³¹ Kramer 12

There are several very prominent personalities of American Jewish literature who set the course of contemporary Jewish American literature – firstly Philip Roth, who has been relating to questions of Jewish identity ever since his first novella, *Goodbye Columbus* (1959), and continues to present Jewish related topics even in his latest works such as *The Plot against America* (2004) or *Nemesis* (2010). His books are often autobiographical and feature his own experience with anti-Semitism as well as his need to cope with the question of identity. Then, there are two Nobel Prize Winners, Saul Bellow, who won it in 1976, and Isaac Bashevis Singer, who was awarded in 1978 as a leading personality of American Yiddish literature. Even though Bellow writes openly about Jewish problems, he cannot be characterised only as an American Jewish author, because he rather represents a leading personality of American (and world-wide) literature than a part of the literature of American Jewish community (however large this group is.)

There are many more authors to mention, but the American Jewish literature is not the main focus of this thesis. To draw a conclusion, American Jewish literature is a much broader term than Anglo-Jewish literature and covers all forms and genres. American Jewish authors, or at least many of them, are important not only to the literature of their minority, but to American literature as a whole.

2. Practical Part

In 2010 Howard Jacobson supported the rising voice of Anglo-Jewish community by his humorous novel *The Finkler Question*. The book immediately drew attention of both critics and readers and became the winner of the 2010 Man Booker Prize. The aim of the practical part of this thesis will be to analyze the text and discuss the author's conception of Jewishness as presented there. The question of modern Anglo-Jewish identity was not the only topic of the book albeit it definitely was one of its leitmotifs. Jacobson presented it thoroughly from several perspectives and depicted the evolution of the problem in time by flashbacks and by describing a development of characters from three different generations.

II.I Perspective

Jacobson manages to present his view on what identifies a member of the Jewish community in a broader picture by introducing several different characters who have to cope with similar problems and who are looking at the problem from different perspectives. The character whose point of view is presented most of the story is Julian Treslove a non-Jew who has been trying to discover the secret of what does make the difference between a Jew and a Gentile since his early school age. Later, when he gets to a critical point in his life, he is forced to re-examine his own purpose in life and decides to finally resolve the question of what makes Jews different and becomes a part of that community himself. His view on the community as an outsider is burdened by stereotyping, lack of information and also by idealizing Jews and seeing the origin of success of individuals in their ethnicity.

The anti-pole of Treslove is his best friend and simultaneously his greatest rival, Sam Finkler, a successful philosopher of Jewish origin who has undergone a change from an ardent Zionist and a man proud of his roots to a man ashamed of both Zionism and his own heritage. As he does not speak for himself a lot in the narrative, his friend does it for him and readers are presented with as many actual Finkler's opinions as Julian Treslove's assumptions of what is going on in Sam's head. The two characters seem to be in contrast, while Treslove desperately wants to become a Jew, Finkler is doing what is in his powers to get rid of the burden of ethnicity and religion. The tension between them creates most of the dynamics of the story. Finkler does not idealise the community he is

a part of, on the contrary, he gets annoyed by the constant stereotyping and feels partial responsibility for the actions of every Jew because he, as a part of the community, has to cope with their consequences.

The third friend, Libor Ševčík, who is similarly to Finkler a widower of Jewish origin (therefore having both things Treslove longed for – a real loss in his life and a distinctive identity), is a generation older than the two previous. Ševčík is an immigrant who fled the Czech Republic not because of fear from anti-Semitism, but because of the communist regime. He is presented as a man of the big world, a famous Hollywood journalist, favourite of many great actresses of the past era, who has not been suffering from living an entire life in a partly closed community, but has an opportunity to take a close look on it. Even though he does not take his Jewish origin very seriously in the beginning, he grows to appreciate his own culture and to be interested in Zionist topic. His character often functions as a bridge between Finkler's and Treslove's differences as he is their friend and their former teacher.

Even though the perspective of the third generation represented by Finkler's and Treslove's children does not have much space in the book, it is an important one to mention. Treslove's sons do not deliver their opinion on Anglo-Jewish identity, their major function is to help to illustrate the instability of the main character who lives in his mind more than in the reality. He dreams about passionate and enduring love but in reality does not care even for his own children and does not understand them. Their disapproval of his trying to find his place in the world as a Jew does not originate from anti-Semitism but from the fact that they know their father's poses. On the other hand, Finkler's children, who get even less space in the novel than Treslove's sons, express their anti-Zionistic sentiments out loud, stretching their father's position to its extreme. Their opinion is not created only on the basis of their own negative experience with fellow Jews but, more importantly, it has been formed by their father's philosophy and opinions. They are Jews who hate being part of that ethnic group and simultaneously they cannot escape it.

Women play an even more important role than the young generation. Finkler's late wife Taylor is not of Jewish origin, nevertheless she fully embraces her husband's minority's traditions and customs and becomes more Jewish than Finkler himself. She manages what Treslove is so unsuccessfully trying to do. The female representative of a lifelong member of the Jewish community is represented by Hephzibah, Libor's niece and Treslove's lover, who contrary to Sam Finkler is an active and satisfied participant on the life of Jewish community. The third important woman is Libor's deceased wife

Malkie, who is mentioned only as a memory through his grief when he often mentions her as a perfect, gentle, virtuous woman. She represents the class division and snobbery within the Jewish community, her family that owns several houses lives up to many negative stereotypes by their haughtiness and elitism. Even though women are important for the story and equal to male characters in their participation in political issues, problems are not really looked at from their perspective.

2.1.1 Gentile point of view

There are three kinds of non-Jewish characters in the novel. The first is created by the uninterested majority not really taking sides but prone to stereotyping such as Treslove's sons or his lovers. The second is represented by characters that idealised Jewish community and their historic and genetic qualities. Finally, the third kind is created by characters that have strongly negative attitude towards Jews in general. The last group is not presented as individuals, but as an anonymous crowd painting anti-Semitic symbols on the gate of the Jewish museum. In the final part of the book, they are described as a creeping thread.

Especially Treslove idealises Jews. He has always been envious of his friend's mental capacity and self-assurance, and because he cannot see any mistake in himself, he decides that Finkler owes his achievements in life to the Jewish genetic makeup and to some kind of pre-destination of Jews to be successful that he, as a non-Jew, has no chance to beat. The major proof of Jewish superiority is for Treslove their ability to play with language and use it to their advantage. When his friend is able to find a Jewish reference even in his innocent enquire after a girl called Juno, he feels it as some kind of failure that he is unable to oppose him with another intellectual joke. The sentence "D'Jew know Jewno?"³² has obviously been haunting Treslove for years, until he finally gets bitter over it. He accuses his Jewish friends of being able to find a Jewish person behind every important event in the history and is unable to think in the same way. He does not understand Jewish traditions and because he needs constant satisfying of his melancholic soul that is what he wants to get out of them. In joining the community, he is looking for self-fulfilment, but he fails to understand what the core of Jewishness is and gradually loses interest in the Jewish issue.

³² Jacobson 19

To prove that the mistake is not on the side of the Jewry, Jacobson juxtaposes Taylor's success in the same field. For her, joining the community is a much easier process, as she does not expect to find her purpose in it. In embracing traditions connected to religion she comes to an understanding of the purifying meaning of those rituals and manages to connect with Jewish history. Her point is not to beat her husband, she does not perceive Jewishness as a means of identifying herself but as a lifestyle and philosophy.

2.1.2 Jewish point of view

There are two major categories of Jewish Characters, the large group of ashamed or self-hating Jews, as Libor refers to Sam's circle of friends, and then Jewish characters satisfied with their heritage and trying to help Zionism and involved in communal life, such as Hephzibah and Libor. There is no representative of an Orthodox Jew, those are completely left out maybe partly because their position is different from secular Jews who do not really observe Judaism and still have to cope with their being different from the majority.

Even the Jews who are not proud of their ethnicity can be further divided in two or three groups. There are people who take advantage of the political influence of the ASHamed Jews group that forms around Finkler and is publicly active and fashionable enough to tempt people who have little in common with Jewishness to join in and present themselves as a part of this group. These people are loud in their criticism of Israeli actions in Gaza but their negative sentiments towards Jewry are more of an advertising than really self-identifying nature. Then there are people who, like Finkler, truly dislike the fact that they are connected (at least in the eyes of the majority of Britain) with actions of a country that they do not call their own. They see their community using the public guilt for Holocaust to their own purposes and disagree with it. They have lost their original faith and traditions but have not embraced any other. This group is also politically active but their negative approach towards Israel is rooted in their philosophy and is not solely a fashion trend. The third subgroup is created by the real Jewish anti-Semites, represented here by Finkler's son Immanuel. They are not interested in politics but their hatred to Zionists and Israeli was deep rooted and violent.

II.II Stereotyping

“‘So, what’s it going to be?’ He asked. ‘Medicine? Law? Accountancy?’ ‘Do you know what that’s called?’ Finkler asked him. ‘Stereotyping. You’ve just stereotyped me.’ ‘You said you knew which side of bread was buttered. Isn’t that stereotyping yourself?’ ‘I am allowed to stereotype myself.’ Finkler told him. ‘Ah,’ Treslove said. As always he wondered if he would ever get to the bottom of what Finklers were permitted to say about themselves that non-Finklers were not.”³³

In her article on stereotyping Heidi Burges explains that this word means “generalizations or assumptions that people make about the characteristics of all members of a group, based on an image (often wrong) about what people in that group are like.”³⁴ Merriam-Webster online dictionary offers similar definition of the word stereotype as “something conforming to a fixed or general pattern; especially: a standardized mental picture that is held in common by members of a group and that represents an oversimplified opinion, prejudiced attitude, or uncritical judgment.”³⁵ In *The Finkler Question*, such stereotypical opinions are mostly presented by Treslove, who seems to have very black and white view on the world and therefore he is not able to look beyond those general judgments. He is often confronted by Finkler who develops a tactics of using common stereotypes connected with Jewishness to his own advantage. Sam seems to enjoy every situation when he can make other people feel guilty about stereotyping him as a Jew and uses that to dominate over conversations.

Throughout the novel, there is a wide spectrum of prejudices connected with Jews from very flattering and almost idealizing ones to those very negative. Nevertheless all of them are presented as something negative as generalizing only strengthens the feeling of exclusion and differentness in Jews and develops hidden anti-Semitic moods in the non-Jewish society.

³³ Jacobson 26

³⁴ <http://www.beyondintractability.org/bi-essay/stereotypes>

³⁵ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/stereotype>

2.2.1 Treslove's, or non-Jewish, view

Among those stereotypes that can be classified as “positive” belongs the alleged Jewish bright intellect and reason. There are several passages where Treslove complains that he can never compete with Finkler intellectually not because his schoolmate would be brighter but because he is a Jew. When he assumes that his friend is going to study some of the fields typically associated with Jewish characters, he only illustrates that this stereotype is very deeply rooted in his mind.

Treslove also accuses Jews of bearing a mark of “God’s covenant”³⁶ and therefore being able to act with certain self-assurance and making other people feel inferior. He envies Finkler his charisma and his self-confident gesticulation and immediately generalizes it as a feature of all Jews. Treslove sees a sign of Jews being a “chosen nation” even in already mentioned Jewish ability to play with language.“Finklers were like that with language, Treslove understood. When they weren’t playing with it they were ascribing holy properties to it. Or the opposite.”³⁷ He thinks that every Jewish person is able to see numerical symbolism in language because it appears in ancient Hebraic literature. He is not able to compete with his friend and rather hides behind the assumption that as a non-Jew he cannot beat those “holy” Jewish qualities and cease to try.

Another ancient stereotype mentioned by Jacobson is Jewish sexuality. Treslove sometimes feels embarrassed by open statements regarding sex made by his two friends and assumes that all Jewish are brought up to discuss such topics in public. Also comparing sexual life of his friends and his own makes him feel like a “Benedictine monk”.³⁸ Treslove is clearly being irrational there, because even though Sam Finkler was not a perfectly faithful husband, it was Treslove who has had many lovers. Nevertheless, he believes this popular opinion so much that he feels insecure every time this topic is discussed and he is trying to prove his masculinity so much that he agrees on having sex with Finkler’s wife and does not even feel ashamed of it. He also believes that there must be something special about Jewish women and when he finds out that Taylor is not originally Jewish he is almost angry.

Probably the most negative stereotype against Jews is associating them with thieves. Finkler comments on his friend’s hysteria over being robbed: “At school they called it Jewing (you probably called it Jewing yourself) – taking what’s not yours. It’s

³⁶ Jacobson 79

³⁷ Jacobson 24

³⁸ Jacobson 47

what you see when you see a Jew – a thief or a skinflint.”³⁹ Treslove’s problem is not as much the attack itself or the fact that he has been robbed by a woman (even though it does hurt his already low self esteem) but the words he believes the woman has said to him – “You Jew”. Even though it is not clear whether she really said something or not, Treslove believes that the mysterious woman mistakes him for a Jew and therefore feels authorized to attack him, steal his valuables and thus take revenge.

2.2.2 Stereotypes among Jewish characters

Although it might seem that Julian Treslove is the only character who thinks in stereotypes, Jewish characters including Sam, his children or Hephzibah see their Jewishness through generalized beliefs as well. Mainly Finkler often uses stereotypes to describe himself and it seems that he partially identifies with this view on himself, letting general prejudices influence his own self-perception. Nevertheless, he does not allow other people to speak about him and Jewry in general with a slightest hint of stereotype and sometimes uses their efforts to speak politically correctly against them and confuses them only to be able to reprove them. He has to constantly cope with being perceived as a Jew and even though he tries to separate from his Jewish roots, being a Jew is still something he unwillingly identifies with.

Hephzibah, on the other hand, does not have a problem with being Jewish. She claims she is not a “synagogue person”⁴⁰ but still she keeps her faith, says prayers and participates in some of Judaic rituals. She does not see herself as a stereotype, this is how she looks at Jewish men. After being married twice to a Jew, she tries to avoid Jewish men like Finkler for example because she thinks they are all too conceited, loud and supercilious.

³⁹ Jacobson 80

⁴⁰ Jacobson 369

2.2.3 The word Jew and its associations

“If this was what all the Jews look like, Treslove thought, then Finkler was a better name for them than Jew. So that was what he called them privately- Finklers. It took away the stigma, he thought. The minute you talked about the Finkler Question, say, or the Finklerish Conspiracy, you sucked out the toxins.”⁴¹

Treslove mentions an interesting idea that Jews are often misjudged because of their name – Jews. He claims that this word associates someone small, dark and beetling, somebody who lives in secret. On the other hand, the term Finkler brings a new set of associations. Finkler is described as a tall man with reddish hair. Thanks to his posture he looks even taller than he actually is and he has a very decisive way of expressing his thoughts with an absolute confidence, which makes people around him feel insecure a little.

As Treslove decides to stop stereotyping Jews by giving them this new secret nickname, he actually only come up with even more stereotypes. He does not irrationally hate Jews, he irrationally adores them. And, in a way, he feels intimidated by them and therefore feels an urgent need to return back to the topic of Jewishness again and again. When he explains to Finkler, that he has been mistaken for a Jew, his friend see that Treslove actually wants to be taken for a Jewish person: “You don’t know what you are so you want to be a Jew. Next time you’ll be wearing fringes and telling me you’ve volunteered to fly Israeli Jets against Hamas. This, Julian, I repeat, is not healthy.”⁴²

⁴¹ Jacobson 20

⁴² Jacobson 82

II.III Jewish names and language

The best evidence of Finkler's inner change is his usage of his first name. In the beginning, he strongly dislikes his nickname Sam. He states that it is a name of a private detective. Instead, he prefers to be called by his full name – Samuel – who is a prophet from the *Old Testament*. When he decides to become a philosopher, which is his own way of fighting again prejudices, he also decides to come under the name Sam, probably not to be taken for a private investigator, but to show his inner shift away from his Jewish background. Also Libor Ševčík, whose name is not recognizably Jewish, changes his name to express his inner change when he becomes journalist in Hollywood. For Hephzibah too, her name is important for its meaning (my delight is in her) and its biblical origin. But even she uses a neutral nickname Juno, which is not so neutral for Julian who believes that he is supposed to meet a woman named Juno who would be a woman of his life.

Names connected to Zionism can have yet a different meaning depending on their pronunciation. When Libor, who is a pro-Zionist, says the word Israel, he stresses the “r” sound and does not pronounce the final “l” sound, because according to Hebraic tradition it signifies the holy name of God that should not be said out loud. “There were some troubles with fellow-Finklers he gathered, especially for the sort who, like Libor, called Israel Isrrae.”⁴³ Finkler, on the other hand, says the word Israel and other Zionism-related terms almost as if they are curses or vulgarisms. Libor and Sam are able to start an argument by only saying one of these words that bear a load of connotations.

Jacobson's Jewish characters do not use Yiddish words very often, nevertheless, this language has its place in the novel. For Finkler, it is associated with the feeling of shame he felt when he used to watch his well-educated father using Yiddish to look more Jewish and familial in the eyes of his customers. For Malkie and Hephzibah it is the language of their parents, of the previous generation generally, and their attitude towards it is quite positive as they both cherish nice memories connected to Jewish words. It is obvious that even though Yiddish language used to be an identifying feature for British Jews in the past, Jacobson no longer perceives it as something that would connect the Jewish community today.

⁴³ Jacobson 68

II. IV Judaic Religion and Rituals

As mentioned above, there is not a single truly Orthodox character in the novel but Judaism plays an important role there. The characters are more or less willing to admit how important the religious rituals are for them, however, each of them have to cope with the question of religion for themselves.

Surprisingly, the character who practices most of the rituals is Tyler, originally a Gentile. Before she married Sam, she has decided to become a Jew to be able to bring up children in a unified family. She does that from her own initiative as Finkler no longer wants to be associated with Judaism himself. She explains: “We were out to conquer the each other’s universe. He wanted the goyim to love him, I wanted the Jews to love me. And I liked the idea of having Jewish children.”⁴⁴ In order to become truly Jewish Taylor has to convert to Judaism and undertake two years of learning how to be a proper Jewish mother, how to run a Jewish home, how to cook kosher meals and how to practice religious rituals in the right way. In the process, she finds a beauty of ritual baths that brings calm and in lighting candles on Sabbath. She cares for those details more than the other Jewish women she knows but, still, her husband does not appreciate it and continues to look at her as if she were a non-Jew. “I’m the Jew of the two of us even I was born a Catholic. I’m the Jewish princess you read about in the fairy stories, only I’m not Jewish.”⁴⁵ That is what divides Taylor and Sam most, their constant effort to become a part of the world that is not their own. Taylor marries Sam among other because of his Jewishness and he marries her because she was a shiksa (a non-Jewish woman). As each of them is trying to become what the other wants to deny, their relationship does not really work and therefore Sam is having sex with his Jewish co-workers and Taylor, to take revenge on Sam, is sleeping with Treslove.

For Sam, religion is not a very important aspect of his Jewishness, nevertheless when Libor dies, his mourning leads him to the nearest synagogue where he can say Kaddish, the prayer for the deceased. His journey through faith is the most interesting one, he starts as a very religious young man, but later loses his faith which he replaces by the shame for being Jewish which, in his case seems to really be a substitute, a whole life philosophy. Nevertheless, when he is confronted with the damage his attitude towards Judaism and Jewishness in general causes in his children who become true Jewish anti-

⁴⁴ Jacobson 92

⁴⁵ Jacobson 94

Semites, mocking the Jews who take their faith seriously, Finkler somewhat inclines back to being religious and starts attending the synagogue again.

Libor seems to be very fond of Jewish traditions such as the Passover service called Seder, where he invites Julian, but does not really follows all the rules given for it. For him spending time with his friends and family is more important than religion. Even though they perform the ritual, they do a quickened form of it to make the service more enjoyable. Hephzibah seems to share his attitude, similarly to Libor, she does not attend the synagogue but she prays at home where nobody can tell her how to do it right. Their attitude towards their religion is very similar to the attitude of most of contemporary Czechs towards Christianity. They still celebrate the important holidays and seem to believe in God in a way but do not participate in the religious life of the community. Their Judaism could be described as “family religion” as their main aim is to strengthen relationship and not connect with God.

Treslove tries to discover the core of Judaism through philosophy and even though he participates in Libor’s Seder, he does not seem to find the essence of it as he is an utterly selfish character, he cannot recognize even the value of the family bonding. He knows the stories of the ancient Israeli tribes and their pilgrimage, but still, the rituals are new for him and he does not understand their meaning. For Treslove, Judaism is more a phase or an experiment than a philosophy or a faith. In the end he loses interest in both Jewishness and Hephzibah and returns to the life he had lead before.

II. V Shame and Mourning

“Just because you’re a Jew doesn’t mean you’re a monster.”

‘I don’t think I’m a monster. I don’t even think you’re a monster. I’m ashamed of Jewish, no, Israeli actions-’

‘There you are then.’

‘It is not peculiar to Jews to dislike what some Jews do.’

‘No, but it’s peculiar to Jews to be ashamed of it. It’s our shtick. Nobody does it better.’”⁴⁶

Feeling of shame and an ability of mourning seem to be two of the most important attributes Jacobson assigns to Jewish nature. Both of these qualities are described mainly in Finkler’s character. No matter how much he tries to distance himself from all that is connected to his Jewish roots, he cannot escape being Jewish in his nature. Later in the text he says that only Jew can be “Jewishly ashamed”⁴⁷ what as he explains means to be able to express their shame “from the inside” as a sense of betrayal, because it were actions of other Jews he stated they disliked.

Jacobson gives his readers partial answers regarding the generation of this feeling of shame in Finkler’s childhood, when his father used to ask him to punch him in the stomach which was a source of embarrassment for the young boy. It seemed to Finkler that his father is making a fool of himself on purpose and this affected him so much that even as adult he has been dreaming about it. Features that young Finkler dislikes so much about his father’s behaviour are closely connected with the way in which the old man showed his belonging to Jewish community in dressing, speaking as well as in his joviality. For Sam, his father becomes the prototype of Jewish person he never wants to become himself. Nevertheless, Jacobson does not see the core of Jewishness in the way people act, more in the way they think and this is something Sam cannot change about himself. He remains the Jew in his feeling of shame for being Jewish.

In the second part of the book, the group of ASHamed Jews plays an important role. It serves as a means of expressing the disapproval of its members with the Israeli actions, however, some of its members only uses it to gain more public attention. Finkler himself, as a leading figure of the group, is looking for both. He uses his rhetoric skills to lead the group where he wants and gains respect among other members. However, after Taylor’s death, he starts to act more restrained, because it was Tyler who particularly

⁴⁶ Jacobson 55

⁴⁷ Jacobson 166

disliked the way he made his shame public. In fact, she did not understand her husband's shame in general. Even though she acts more Jewish than he does, as she was not born and raised in Jewish way, she can never really think in the way that Jacobson describes as Jewish. She tries to explain Julian that "you've got to be a Jew to get why to get why you're ashamed of being a Jew."⁴⁸ In her opinion, Jews are simply too preoccupied with themselves and with their Jewishness, therefore they need the public to know about their shame.

Mourning is described from various perspectives. Both Jewish main characters, Sam and Libor, are grieving over their deceased wives. Each of the men has his own way to express his grief, Sam is carefully searching his feelings, because as his relationship with Taylor was not really close any more, he does not want to weep out of anger, but only for the right reasons, out of sadness and feeling of loss. He is able to mourn for his wife only after the death of his friend. Then, he starts to mourn in the Jewish way with Kaddish on his lips. And once he starts he cannot stop. Because as the final sentence of the book says: "There are no limits to Finkler's mourning."⁴⁹

On the other hand, Hephzibah mourns in tears. She cries for those who died as well as for Julian who simply left and became dead for her. Libor cries too even though not as much as his niece. He seemingly achieves what Finkler cannot do - to forget himself in his grief. He plays Malkie's piano and smells her clothes. No matter how hard he tries to start living his life again without her, she is always there. For Libor, the grieving becomes the way of living his last months. And it is the cause of his suicide in the end, because in ending his life as they planned together with Malkie, he can honour her memory and end the unbearable loneliness.

Jewish ability to mourn deeply and endlessly is presented as another ancient Jewish feature. One member of the ASHamed Jews is described weeping over the generations of his Jewish ancestors that died during the Holocaust only few days after he learned he was Jewish. Also Sam and Hephzibah are grieving for more than the one person who died, they mourn generally and, as in Libor's case, it becomes the way of living and expressing their Jewishness for both of them.

⁴⁸ Jacobson 147

⁴⁹ Jacobson 370

II.VI Anti-Semitism

There are two kinds of anti-Semitism described in the novel. The first one, as it has been mentioned before, is the Jewish anti-Semitism of which Libor repeatedly accuses Finkler and his friends. Mostly, it does not lead to violence but rather creates an intellectual environment unfriendly to the state of Israel and all Zionist ideas. Majority of these people are not really anti-Semites but anti-Zionists and, as Jews themselves, they don't consider themselves anti-Semites at all. The only one who uses violence to express his hostility towards an Orthodox Jew is Finkler's son, who attacks another young man solely because of his appearance. Even though he himself does not see that as an anti-Semitic act, his father is horrified and immediately recognises it for what it is. When he discovers that his own philosophy contributed to his son's hateful attitude towards other Jews, he realises its danger. When he tries to understand the source of his own dislike of Israel, he remembers Tyler explaining him, that in reality, he was a patriot, but while he feared to lose something dear to him, he rather destroys it himself. He does not fully embrace the idea that he would be an anti-Zionist because of his secret love for Israel, but he never entirely rejects it and the question of the true reason why he ASHamed Jews stand against all the Israeli politics remains unsolved.

The other form of anti-Semitism comes in a creeping way as an anonymous underground anti-Jewish mood which is demonstrated by Nazi symbols and slogans drawn on the walls. It is not certain where and when this animosity originates, it comes in a sudden wave and causes the fear in Jewish community in London. In fact, Julian is the one who is most confronted with it as he at first witness and prevents bullying of Orthodox Jewish schoolboy by his schoolmates and then as he is involved in a fight with Arabic protestants in front of the Jewish Museum. Treslove believes that the attack when the mysterious woman has bobbed him was also anti-Semitic and when he starts to look for the signs of anti-Semitism on the internet, he finds many entries, some of them referring to accidents that have happened in Britain. "In Birmingham, a twelve-year-old schoolgirl fled a mob of children no older than she was chanting "Death to Jews". And in London, just around the corner from the BBC, a forty-nine-year-old Gentile with orderly features was robbed of his valuables and called a Ju."⁵⁰ Origins of this second form of anti-Semitism are explained more clearly as an animosity towards everybody who differs from the majority.

⁵⁰ Jacobson 98

Conclusion

Howard Jacobson incorporates many Jewish-related issues into his awarded novel and thus contributes to the recent wave of Anglo-Jewish revival. The fact, that the question of Jewishness is one of the main concerns of the novel reveals already the name: *The Finkler Question*, because Finklers is a secret nickname one of the main characters uses for Jews, therefore translated to the common English it means The Jewish Question.

Jacobson sets his novel into the contemporary London and represents wide-scale of characters to be able to show what he considers to be the essence of Jewishness. When the main characters remember the generation of their parents, Jacobson shows how the Jewish community and the Jews themselves changed. Yiddish is not presented as a language connecting members of the Jewish community but only a memory, sometimes happy, sometimes bringing bitter feelings. Also non-Jewish characters are presented, mainly those who try to penetrate the quite closed Jewish community, but also characters who do not have any relationship to the community.

The two main characters are contrasting each other, one being a Jew who dislikes his Jewish heritage, the second one being a non-Jew who envies his friend and desperately wants to become a member of Jewish community and to achieve this, he tries to sort out for himself what makes Jews different. After half a lifetime he realises that he is never going to succeed because to understand some of the most important features of Jewish thinking and nature, he would have to be born and raised as a Jew. His friend's wife who has not been born a Jewess nevertheless manages to became a member of the community, as she thinks even better and more participating member than her husband, who, however, never really perceives her as a Jew.

Jacobson also shows different approaches to religion and traditions. Even though both have lost a lot of its original importance, they are still an important connecting point for Jewish families. When two of the main characters celebrate Seder together, they do not perform the whole rituals, but uses the simplified version to make it more enjoyable. Religion and its rituals also help many contemporary Jews to express their Jewishness. Even a character who tried to distance himself from his Jewish roots starts to attend the synagogue again when a friend of his commits suicide. Prayers help him cope with grief.

Jacobson brings up two important notions that according to him distinguish Jews from Gentiles and these are their feeling ashamed for being Jewish and their ability

to make mourning a centre of life. These two concepts are not easy to understand for the non-Jewish characters and there even Taylor Finkler does not manage to become fully Jewish in the essence of their thinking. Grieving is one of the important motives of the novel as both of the Jewish main protagonists are widowers and have to cope with pain and loss of their beloved ones.

All the characters, including the Jewish ones, have to deal with their own prejudices against Jews. Each character looks at Jewish people with some stereotypes, not necessarily negative. For example Julian Treslove has strongly idealised view on Jews, he sees them as a chosen nation of God which posses a special genetic makeup that makes them cleverer mainly when it comes to using a language. On the other hand, Jewish characters are not described as more moral, there is not one character described utterly positive, everyone has his or her mistakes and transgressions. Jacobson, however, describes a world full of very successful and intelligent Jewish characters that all fulfil some of the stereotypes to a certain degree. Despite their preoccupation with themselves, they are described in a rather positive light.

The novel is humorous in tone, however the topics it covers are serious and sometimes almost depressive therefore the overall impression is more bitter than comic. Alongside Jewishness it comments on topics such as friendship, loyalty or belonging. Even though there is no happy ending, the novel cannot be seen as tragic. Even though Treslove, who had been trying to become a member of Jewish community, does not succeed, his friend finally recognises the importance of his heritage and community and manages to overcome the shame of being Jewish that he had to cope with since his youth.

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Resumé

This thesis focuses on the contemporary Anglo-Jewish Literature and its recent revival. Its main aim is to explain the concept of Jewishness as it is described by Howard Jacobson in his novel *The Finkler Question*. It consists of two parts, theoretical and practical. The first part provides background information on the history of the Jewish minority in Britain and its current position within the British society, it also describes the two basic Jewish literary types which occurs in the works of non-Jewish authors and compares Jewish literatures in Britain and America.

The second part analyses the text itself. It focuses on the perspective which the author uses to show his view on the question of Jewish identity, compares the point of view of the Jewish and the non-Jewish characters. It also describes how Jacobson works with stereotypes, what role Judaism plays in the novel and what anti-Semitic issues are mentioned in the book.

Anotace

Tato bakalářská práce je zaměřená na současnou britskou židovskou literaturu a obrození, kterým momentálně prochází. Cílem této práce je vysvětlit, jak Howard Jacobson prezentuje ve svém románu *Finklerovská otázka* koncept židovství. Skládá se ze dvou částí, teoretické a praktické. První část poskytuje informace o historii židovské menšiny v Británii a jejím současném postavení v britské společnosti. Také jsou zde popsány dva základní literární židovské typy, které se objevují v literatuře psané autory patřícími k britské většinové společnosti a je zde porovnání židovské literatury v Británii a Americe.

Druhá část analyzuje vybraný text. Zaměřuje se na perspektivu, kterou autor užívá, aby ukázal svůj pohled na otázku židovské identity, porovnává úhel pohledu židovských a nežidovských postav. Také popisuje, jak Jacobson pracuje se stereotypy, jakou roli v knize hraje Judaismus a jak se v knize zmiňuje problematika antisemitismu.

Key Words

Anglo-Jewish literature, Howard Jacobson, The Finkler Question, revival of Anglo-Jewish literature, identity, assimilation, anti-Semitism

Klíčová slova

anglická židovská literatura, Howard Jacobson, Finklerovská otázka, obrození anglické židovské literatury, identita, asimilace, antisemitismus.